

QUANDARIES OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

VOICES FROM
PRINCIPALS IN THE FIELD



Edited by
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Quandaries of School Leadership

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Gary Ivory • Michele Acker-Hocevar
Editors

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Voices from Principals in the Field

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ISBN 978-3-319-59119-3 ISBN 978-3-319-59120-9 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-59120-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017946888

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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The Journey Begins

Debra J. Touchton

Leadership development is a life-long journey. It is not an event; it is a process. Vaill (1989) asserts in his book *Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change* that management/leadership is a performing art. Have you ever thought of leadership that way? I had not until reading his book (1989).

He states:

If management is a performing art, the consciousness of the management is transformed, I think. One becomes much more interested in the quality of the process and much more aware of how a given course of action does or does not resemble other things that one has done or not done (p. 1544).

We want you to see this book as a piece of sheet music, the map to your own leadership development; the school leader as the conductor; the school as the orchestra. Using this metaphor, the chapter authors assist you, the conductor, as you create your own music to lead your school. Let's think about the conductor: What does a conductor do? The orchestra conductor

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leads the musicians with exactness, inspiration, and passion. Isn't that how effective, successful school leaders conduct the music of teaching and learning? You will read more about this concept of leadership as a performing art in the contributions by John Mancinelli and Michele Acker-Hocevar (Chap. 2), and by Gary Ivory and Rhonda McClellan (Chap. 13).

This book provides you with four products:

1. Descriptions of quandaries faced by real school leaders in the twenty-first century, told to us in their own words. These leaders provide vivid and compelling views of the world in which you work or aspire to work. Your work as an educational leader will be largely about facing quandaries, such as those our principals described.
2. A variety of different perspectives: (a) those of principals who participated in focus groups across the nation; (b) theoretical frameworks introduced to you that offer insight into patterns of behavior; (c) those of the chapter authors; and (c) additional resources found within each chapter.
3. Reflective questions, providing you with the opportunity to think about how you might resolve quandaries that principals have faced in their lives and work as they described them in focus groups. Your solutions may be as multifaceted as the quandaries.
4. The opportunity to develop a leadership platform that reflects your knowledge, values, and beliefs based on quandaries that principals have faced in the field. This platform is your own perspective on education and educational leadership. It is a reminder of what you think is valuable, and important to know and remember—an ethical compass of sorts—suggesting the direction you might take and not regret later.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK FOR ME?

In each chapter, you will be given a glimpse into principals' work through excerpts from the *Voices 3* focus transcripts. The principals' contributions portray quandaries that they faced. The chapter authors introduce theoretical frameworks for you to think about while you examine a principal's quandary. The authors' job is to make addressing each quandary complicated, while your job is to anticipate the various viewpoints of stakeholders so as to consider a multitude of solutions about how you might address the

quandaries, and what responses and reactions might occur. The authors have included reflection questions. Some have chosen to embed these within the chapter while others have added them at the end of their chapter. Either way, the questions are a way for you to ponder the quandaries, as well as further develop and enhance your leadership platform and cognitive sophistication when thinking about solutions.

THE *VOICES 3* RESEARCH PROJECT

The *voices* you encounter in these chapters are real. In a project entitled *Voices from the Field: Phase 3 (Voices 3)*, researchers across the USA conducted focus groups in which the interviewer asked questions and encouraged a conversation among the participants (Acker-Hocevar et al. 2009). Between 2003 and 2006, thirteen principal focus groups were conducted around the country in small and medium-sized school districts. The gender and ethnicity of the eighty-four principals in the study are shown in Table 1.1.

The focus group questions were based on Murphy’s (2006) “anchors” for school-leadership preparation. Principals were asked to share their perspectives on (1) the No Child Left Behind Act (in force at the time of the study); (2) doing what’s best for children; and (3) how they involve “other people wanting to have a voice in decision making” (Acker-Hocevar et al. 2012, p. 4). The focus groups’ conversation were transcribed and analyzed, and the stories presented within the chapters come directly from these transcripts. Each *Voices 3* principal cited in this book has been given a number to ensure confidentiality. Some chapter authors have supplemented the *Voices 3* data with interviews they have conducted with other principals. Those principals are not numbered.

Table 1.1 Principals’ demographics

<i>Gender</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>European American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Not reported</i>	<i>Total</i>
Female	7	18	5	7	6	43 (50.6%)
Male	3	29	4	3	2	41 (48.2%)
Total	10 (11.8%)	47 (55.3%)	9 (10.6%)	10 (11.8%)	9 (10.6%)	84 (100%)

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

When conceiving of and compiling this book, the chapter authors were asked to address one of the ten Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs) that most related to their chapter. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration adopted the PSELs in 2015 (NPBEA 2015). The PSELs replaced the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards. Like the ISLLC Standards, the PSELs were designed to guide policy, to frame most licensure examinations, and to outline the competencies needed by today's school leaders. The ten standards are listed below and are explained further in Chap. 3:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

Quandary: What Is It?

You may be asking yourself, “What is a quandary?” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as a state of uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation. A few synonyms to further the understanding of a quandary are predicament, trouble, mess, and dilemma. Principals encounter many situations and challenges during their day. Leaders who think about opposing ideas, and who compare and contrast solutions from different frameworks and perspectives when handling quandaries, are more likely to be consider creative and innovative solutions (Acker-Hocevar et al. 2015).

So why did we choose “quandary” to shape the chapters in this book? Let’s go back to the idea of leadership as a performing art. Think of a group of musicians getting together to jam. Do they follow a piece of music note by note or do they begin with the original piece and add as they go? It depends on the setting, the context, doesn’t it? If you have ever sat in on a jam session as the listener or as one of the “jammers,” you know that the

music that the musicians start with isn't what they may end up with. This is based on who comes in and goes out during the jam, what instruments the musicians are playing, and the feel of the room. That is what happens when principals are faced with a certain quandary: the context is never the same and the players have different skill sets.

You will read about many different quandaries that the chapter authors have gleaned from the principal focus group transcripts. Acker-Hocevar et al. (2015) posit: "School leadership is not simply putting prescribed solutions into action, but a constant encounter with quandaries that demand thinking and problem-solving, responding, and adjusting to the situations at hand" (p. 5). This is what jazz improvisation is all about. As a leader, you must develop a finely honed set of skills that allow you to use them as a toolbox of sorts to address different problems and arrive at workable solutions that fit with the overall direction, as well as your beliefs and values.

Theoretical Frameworks

In addition to learning from their experiences and the opinions of others, leaders can benefit from the guidance of theoretical frameworks. These function like crude maps or unfinished sheets of music. They are not exact formulas or recipes but they can inform and guide behavior for someone who reflects on them (Argyris and Schon 1978). Bolman and Deal (2008) wrote:

The world for most managers and administrators is a world of messes: complexity, ambiguity, value dilemmas, political pressures and multiple constituencies. For managers whose images blind them to important parts of the chaotic reality, it is a world of frustration and failure. For those with better theories and the intuitive capacity to use them with skill and grace, it is a world of excitement and possibility (p. 41).

The authors present a variety of theoretical frameworks across this book. Here is a brief look at Chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 (principal quandary chapters) and the perspectives on which the authors have based their individual chapters. The Chap. 4 uses the bureaucratic and participatory models as a theoretical framework to explore how principals clarify organizational expectations to meet the demands often levied upon their schools. Chapter 5 examines the interplay of ethics through the lens of a

distributive and facilitative power framework in promoting the academic success and well-being of all students. Social justice serves as the theoretical framework for Chap. 6 for school leaders promoting the acceptance and inclusion of all culturally and linguistically diverse groups of students in school today. Chapter 7 focuses on the principal as the leader of learning and school improvement while dealing with accountability issues. In Chap. 8, the author examines the emotional intelligence (EI) framework for school leaders grappling with how to best support their students while being tasked with doing more with less owing to recent and continuing budget cuts. The authors of Chap. 9 frame their contribution within the principal effectiveness theoretical perspective and the importance that school leaders have in encouraging teachers in their professional capacity within the accountability movement. School leaders' role in creating a professional learning community that emphasizes a culture of trust, shared vision, and action research that impacts student success serves as the theoretical framework for Chap. 10. Chapter 11 invites readers to consider the micropolitical theoretical framework for challenges that principals often address in their leadership when dealing with resource allocation. Chapter 12 shares theoretical perspectives on effective leadership through first- and second-order change as principals lead stakeholders and navigate change in their schools.

Reading and thinking about the different theoretical frameworks included in this book should help you develop more perspectives on quandaries and make you better at negotiating them. Perhaps that is why psychologist Kurt Lewin remarked: "Nothing is as practical as a good theory" (1951, p. 169).

SUMMARY

The everyday work of principals is complex and, at times, frustrating. However, there are many days of satisfaction and enjoyment. As mentioned earlier, there are no easy solutions to quandaries that school leaders face daily. Just as there are no easy solutions, nothing replaces understanding that leadership and learning are not separate constructs but should be intertwined and supportive of ongoing improvement and practice. Just as the most accomplished musicians continue to practice, so must a leader continue to develop their knowledge so as to be responsive and adaptive like the jazz improvisation player.

Acknowledgments I am extremely grateful for several groups of people who have made contributions to this book. First and foremost, I thank the principals across the nation who took time from their busy schedules to participate in the *Voices 3* focus groups, the heart of this book. Secondly, to the researchers who scheduled and facilitated the focus groups, your work is greatly appreciated. A special thank-you to the chapter authors' for their commitment and flexibility. Lastly, I must acknowledge my co-editors for their perseverance and teamwork on this project.

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Understanding Role-Making in Leadership Performance

John Mancinelli and Michele Acker-Hocevar

This book is a cooperative effort between academics and practitioners to provide aspiring principals with an understanding of how their future role can be shaped by rehearsing leadership quandaries. Within these quandaries, we examine leadership complexity from two related concepts referred to as role-taking and role-making. We discuss how various leadership theories and personal and contextual factors will influence your choices in role-making. We compare role-taking and role-making to the journey of a musician who gains fluency over time to that of a leader gaining expertise over time.

Role-taking is simply imitating what you think you should do as a principal without much thought as to why or how this supports intentional leadership action to promote student success. Although role-taking can be highly efficient in recreating templates for people to mimic a prescribed set of role behaviors, it may be quite deficient in helping the same new leader adapt to new and unique challenges s/he will be facing to improve learning outcomes and solve other serious organizational problems. Therefore, leadership adaptation requires role-making where the leader adjusts his/her role

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within a specific context and time in history to address problems with intentional action. This action should include how you understand and use leadership frameworks to see problems in practice in distinctive ways. Your leadership platform differs from your use of leadership frameworks. Your leadership platform is the compass that guides how and what frameworks might be a better match for you with your values and beliefs. But role-making adds another layer of understanding because role-making involves how you bring extant knowledge together with your beliefs and values to conceive your role. Fundamentally, the conception of this role is related to the more knowledge a leader has of himself/herself, of different leadership theoretical frameworks, of the historical evolution of the principal's role over time, and the interplay between personal and contextual factors to solve problems and innovate, the better leader they will become. In fact with this knowledge, the leader becomes more sophisticated in his/her responses to problems-of-practice. And the more willing the leader is to learn and ask questions about why s/he is doing what they are doing and how s/he might incorporate various aspects of his/her learning into practice to shape the role, the more agile the leader will become as a role-maker, an innovator versus a conformer.

We review several leadership theories in this chapter so you can see why leaders must be adaptive. Subsequently, and within the quandaries presented in this book, we ask you to explore questions that distinguish role-taking from role-making. In regard to role-taking, consider "What defines my role?" "Who defines my role?" In contrast to role-taking, role-making is about your intentional adaptation to the school context and your deliberate choices for a course of action that will influence purposeful change. Questions such as, "What impact does my interpretation of the role here on how I go about solving this problem?" and "How should I use my role to select an appropriate leadership theoretical framework to create excellence in this context?" These questions should punctuate your thinking as you become a more expert leader. Notably, and as you read the following book chapters, ask yourself what arguments chapter authors might wish you to consider on your journey to becoming a role-maker. Reflect on our analogy between the development of a musician and your development as a performance-based leader. In other words, imitation in role-taking may be a natural progression to role-making in the process of what we call performance-based leadership. Recognizing rehearsal time, such as imitation, is needed for any performance to become part of your own repertoire.

We explore now how our music analogy might elucidate a clearer understanding of what we mean.

EXPLORING PERFORMANCE-BASED LEADERSHIP THROUGH A MUSICAL ANALOGY

To assist the reader in understanding role-taking and role-making, we use an analogy of performance-based leadership through the eyes of a musician throughout this chapter. Both the leader and the musician must be skillfully prepared, self-aware, and continuously attuned to the environment s/he is situated within to achieve a successful performance. Both must practice his/her leadership or musical performance as s/he gains knowledge or automaticity over time to enhance his/her repertoire of conceptual flexibility, intentional choice, and reflection on how to improve student learning or impact a musical recitation positively. Carefully enacting the role or skillfully playing the piece challenges the emerging leader and the novice musician to enlarge conceptual fluency and to address problems-of-practice as new musical pieces challenge a musician. By thinking like a musician who must be both a proficient player and an adaptive interpreter of the audience, s/he is trying to influence (not to mention the other musicians with whom s/he is performing)—the leader too must possess a knowledge of many genres of music as a leader must understand different leadership theories. Musicians appreciate the legacy from Brahms to the Beatles. Ultimately, however, the leader will need to understand how to use elements from leadership legacy that will explicitly shape his/her role. This role will be informed by his/her leadership platform and as a response to many messy problems s/he will surely encounter—problems that will require conceptual flexibility and nuanced responses. Hence, we encourage the emergent leader to recognize how personal values and dispositions will influence choices and idiosyncratic responses and personal interactions with others that will either positively or negatively impact his/her ability to lead changes within his/her school. The skillset you develop as a leader that is yours affects and is tied to role-making.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Once you enter the official role of principal, it won't take long for you to realize that there are many expectations placed upon you. The job posting usually outlines some expectations for you; however, it leaves out the

expectations of peer administrators, supervisors, teachers, parents, and students. Not all of these expectations will align with your own perception of the role nor even be complimentary with each other. The reason for inherent contradictions can be traced to an amalgamation of perceived responsibilities from past roles. Many of these expectations were shaped from global legacies passed from one generation of administrators to another. They were sculpted into current educational policy, role expectations from mentors, and create a gateway of passage for the new principal to be seen as legitimate players as s/he enters the new role. For the new principal, the challenge, therefore, is to construct his/her role carefully and incorporate legacy while simultaneously being aware that strict adherence to any predefined role or role-taking (Hart 1993) ignores adaptability. Role-taking is static and disregards a reciprocal leadership process that is grounded in the dynamic interaction between the leader and the various audiences s/he must interact—performance leadership.

Performance-based leadership, therefore, is reflective, relational, contextual, and collaborative. It engages constituents with the leader to define and agree upon how a model performance will appear. Simply put, traditional role-taking processes inadequately prepare principals for the complexities of the role today. These processes do not provide the forward strategy to assess what leadership frameworks can assist a leader with different skillsets from role-taking (Crow 2010). Rather, role-taking provides more of a backward gaze. A shift from role-taking to role-making, a relatively recent phenomenon, represents leadership as synonymous with learning. Role-making allows a leader to construct their role to respond to existing conditions that can influence reciprocal leadership performance between leaders and followers. We provide a present-day example.

ROLE-MAKING: A CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVE TO TRADITIONAL ROLE-TAKING

So we must now look forward to role-making as a contrasting perspective to more traditional characteristics of role-taking. This is complicated because we cannot totally ignore the historical evolution of the principal's role over time. Yet role-making is about the principal's ongoing adaptation to existing conditions that influence his/her role and include legacy (e.g., what has occurred in the school prior to your leadership and what has occurred overall in the role writ large), personal context (e.g., leadership

platform, dispositions, and values), and school context (e.g., type of school, location) (Crow 2010).

For example, today's Principals are rated on performance within assumptions that they—as performers—must possess high levels of skills that apply deep and broad knowledge, adapt to various challenges, and continuously respond to changing student needs, teacher requirements, technological advancements, and shift educational standards to improve learning within a community (Knapp et al. 2010; Mancinelli 2014; Portin et al. 2009). Previous generations of principals were rated on building management and operations with limited responsibility toward student performance or instructional leadership. Such a shift toward enhanced performance means that the principal must prioritize leadership behaviors over managerial behaviors that do not impact learning performance but may be necessary to ensure things like clean building are completed. Bluntly put, the ends justify the means. Or said another way, leaders today must be creative and ethical; they must be adaptive solution-centered thinkers. This requires the principal to imagine the performance and what s/he needs to be successful. Conformity must be replaced by adaptability.

PERFORMANCE-BASED LEADERSHIP

Thus as a new aspiring principal, it will be essential for you to have a strong understanding of your role in order to be effective. You will need to understand the scope of your responsibilities; what resources are available to you; how to contextualize problems-of-practice for student learning improvement to occur; how to make decisions about setting expectations with a depth of content knowledge, instructional pedagogy, and data use; how to manage resources; how to develop human capital; how to create structures to support effective practices. Even more significantly as a new principal, you will need to understand how to accomplish all of these things in varying school contexts by adapting your leadership strategies to define and enact your role in situ. Therefore, it does not take long for anyone considering becoming a principal to realize that leading schools in today's educational environment is a very complex task and one in which the demands of the principal's role can be overwhelming.

Because the principal's role has evolved from a traditional managerial role to a performance-based distributed leadership role that focuses much more today on student learning, your ability to apply multiple concepts and skills to be a successful leader means you must enact the role differently and build

collective expertise and efficacy within your school (Acker-Hocevar et al. 2012; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Leithwood and Strauss 2008; Portin et al. 2006; Thompson and Vecchio 2009). Contributing to this shift toward performance-based leadership is educational policies that increase the accountability of teachers and school leaders to respond dynamically to student needs. This requires new and vigorous leadership approaches (Copland et al. 2003; Knapp et al. 2010; Lai 2015; Mancinelli 2014; Portin et al. 2006, 2009).

As a leader then, you will be measured by your abilities to address continually changing contexts that affect your students' achievement. Many educational leaders draw upon their teaching experiences for decision-making as a principal. This may be appropriate if you are leading a school with similar contexts; however, it is erroneous to think that you know all the various teaching and learning contexts you will encounter as a leader. For instance, as a teacher you may have worked in an affluent school where your challenges were significantly different from the myriad of problems and demands in a neighboring school of poverty. Drawing upon your experience is essential in order to relate to teachers and anticipate problems affecting implementation; however, a shift of a school context requires adaptability. Adapting to a new context will require you to interpret and reinterpret your role as you take cues from others as to what is needed to enact your role in this new situation—again that reciprocal relationship to be both understood and understand what the issues are will enable you to focus.

Your current experiential knowledge may not be enough to lead schools in today's dynamic environment. For this reason, it is incumbent upon you to prepare, as a musician would, for any type of performance that might come your way. Your preparation, critical to your success, requires thoughtful attention to your leadership platform, understanding of leadership theoretical frameworks, knowledge of legacy, and the ability to adapt to various contexts. But, all of these must also be paired with your willingness to learn—it is an ongoing process of reflection and personal insights.

PREPARING FOR THE PERFORMANCE JOURNEY AS AN ASPIRING MUSICIAN

We relate to the journey that you are about to embark upon as similar to the journey one of the authors, we'll refer to as "Paul," took during his undergraduate years as an aspiring musician and music educator. As a

musician, Paul had to prepare himself with skills and knowledge that allowed him to walk onto any stage and perform inspiring and stylistically appropriate music in his role as a lead trumpeter. This meant he had to develop technical skills and knowledge through consistent and regular practice until his playing became a subconscious response to his context. Additionally, Paul had to learn to use these skills within various theoretical frameworks or, to use a musical term, genres.

As a principal, you will be faced with similar challenges. You will need to develop your understanding of theory and technical skills to the point that you can apply them naturally while performing daily functions. This does not mean that you are unaware of what you are doing nor does this refute reflection on your actions at a later time. It means that you will need to achieve a level of automaticity or fluency with various skillsets in order to focus on the big picture of the performance.

To the point, as a musician, Paul needed to understand his role and how to adjust it within various performing groups in order to achieve an inspiring performance. Role anticipation allowed him to better prepare, make decisions, and take actions within the context of any venue. Specifically, it was important to know if and when it was his turn to lead or follow. Paul's role became malleable and flexible enough to achieve an excellent performance while working with others. Again, this required him to continuously learn and reflect on his choices. This is also true as you think about more contemporary approaches and corresponding theories to educational leadership discussed in this chapter.

As a soloist, Paul learned to be out front directly engaging his audience and leading the rest of the musicians with poise and confidence. Paul had to learn to interpret the reaction from the audience in order to select appropriate music and adjust his performance to engage them fully. Understanding stylistic interpretation was essential because all other musicians would take cues from him based upon their collective understanding of the characteristics of that style. This affected the performance expressively by placing intricate inflections on certain notes or phrasing of the melody. Paul's personal interpretation formed and informed his role and the role of others in the performance group.

Paul also learned to play background parts that required him to be extremely sensitive to the lead performer and careful so as not to overshadow but to follow someone else's interpretation of the music. In short, as a musician, it was essential to maintain a command of technical skills and theoretical perspectives in order to understand and adjust his role within

each performance context to be successful. A principal must also know when it is appropriate to take the lead, follow a lead, and when to solicit leadership from others.

Finally, Paul had to learn how to identify appropriate feedback from the audience and fellow musicians and adjust his performance when needed to ensure that the audience connected meaningfully with the music. Using this analogy of a musician illustrates the complexity of educational leadership in today's schools (Crow 2010). The elements of becoming a strong musician parallel with the skills needed to be developed by principals to adapt their roles to the continuously changing landscape and contexts required by leaders in today's schools.

Of course a principal needs a strong command of technical skills so as to not be distracted from thinking forward—meaning a fluent contextually appropriate response to what is occurring in the context that will contribute to a good performance. Just as a musician caught up in reading and playing notes cannot focus on the larger context of performance, a principal consumed in the mechanics of daily operations cannot address the larger context of what is occurring in the school. Fluency of skills directly affects the capacity of the performer's abilities to be effective in addressing more complex and nuanced issues and to focus on what is required.

Fluency relies partially on the fact that higher-order thinking and reasoning can only occur after rudimentary skills can be performed with a level of automaticity allowing for the strategic application of knowledge and skills to solve routine problems. Grashow et al. (2009) describe the fluency phenomenon as the ability to “sit in the balcony” where the leader is able to keep perspective about the larger context in order to make sound judgments and not go off on tangents. Although the development of these skills and knowledge are important and must be part of ongoing learning for principals, these areas are not the focus of this chapter. In this chapter, we ask you to move beyond technical skills toward the more sophisticated application skills of leadership. This is where you think about your role in terms of what it means to enact that role within a particular context; how you identify with your role and define it. Of course, technical skills form the foundation for your leadership development and should not be forgotten. Remember, however, that just as a musician practices his/her scales on a daily basis in order to achieve automaticity and stamina, you too may need regular practice with basic skills in terms of increasing your technical knowledge. That is where the toolbox comes in for you to use.